7520

AN

EXAMINATION

OF THE

LEADING PRINCIPLE

OF

THE NEW SYSTEM OF MORALS,

AS THAT PRINCIPLE IS STATED

AND APPLIED IN

Mr. GODWIN's ENQUIRY

CONCERNING

POLITICAL JUSTICE,

IN A LETTER TO A FRIEND.

K.

By THOMAS GREEN, Esq.

THE SECOND EDITION.

The boundaries that have hitherto ſerved to divide Virtue and Vice, are gone. The true intereſts of mankind require, not their removal, but their confirmation.

Political Juſtice, Book 4, C. 3, 4to Edit.

SOLD BY T. N. LONGMAN,

PATERNOSTER-ROW, LONDON,

[Price Two Shillings.]

BRITISH MUSEUM

PREFACE

TO

THE SECOND EDITION.

I Have ſupplied, in this Edition, a material defect, and rectified ſome conſequent errors, in the *hiſtory* (if I may preſume to call it ſo) of the Principle diſcuſſed in the following Letter, which I have at the ſame time conſiderably abridged. There are ſome other paſſages, too, which have been ſlightly retouched, in other parts of the Letter; but, far from requiring, they would ſcarcely juſtify, particular notice. The extract ſubjoined in the poſtſcript, wants no apology, I apprehend.

One miſconception I wiſh to guard againſt in this place, becauſe it radically affects my whole

whole deſign, and I really do not ſee how it could have been more effectually obviated in the Letter itſelf. I have been conſidered as oppoſing merely the theory of Mr. Godwin; and combating poſitions altogether peculiar to that Gentleman, and unconnected with any prevailing opinions on politics or morals. The conſequences involved in ſuch a ſuppoſition, muſt naturally make me anxious to have it underſtood and felt, That it is not with Mr. Godwin's Syſtem merely, but with the Principle from which that Syſtem is deduced, and which may briefly be defined "the reſolving morality into ex-" " pediency", that I am really at iſſue in the following pages. This Principle did not originate with Mr. Godwin: he found it, where we may all find it, in moſt of the leading authorities of the age: he aſſumed it as a point eſtabliſhed, beyond all controverſy,

verſy, in the general opinion of mankind: and he purſued it to concluſions, revolting certainly, and conſidered as mere propoſitions undeſerving any ſerious anſwer, but which are well warranted, I think, by the premiſes he had adopted; which had already been partially diſcloſed by thoſe who had taken the ſame ground before; and which I have employed for no other purpoſe than to expoſe, more flagrantly, the original error from which they are derived. Whether I have been correct in this view of the ſubject, or judicious in treating it in this way, is for others to determine; but I may be allowed to inſiſt that thus, and thus only, I have viewed and treated it.

Nothing, I am ſure, could have induced me thus publicly to controvert this Principle, but a full perſuaſion that it was not only erroneous,

roneous, but miſchievous: that it had not merely a tendency to miſlead us in our enquiries after truth; but by extinguiſhing, to its power, thoſe natural feelings ordained by Providence to cultivate our ſocial character, and ſubſtituting nothing but looſe caſuiſtical ſpeculation, to diſpoſe the mind, either towards a low and ſordid ſelfiſhneſs, incapable of all honourable and virtuous exertion; or to wild, daring, experimental projects of reform, which having no regard to the real conſtitution of human nature, either in the meaſures they preſcribe or in the ends they aim at, muſt unavoidably terminate, after a long train perhaps of dreadful calamities, in deluſion and ruin. If I have conſidered it more particularly in the ſubſequent Letter, as tending to the latter of theſe evils, it is becauſe it leads, I conceive, more directly to this iſſue, and becauſe it has certainly been em-

employed more expreſsly to this end; and by no means from the want of a full ſenſe of its ſubſervience, in a narrower view, to the moſt ſhameleſs and ſyſtematical corruption; or from an inſenſibility to our danger from that quarter. What gives this Morality of Expediency ſuch an alarming aſpect, indeed, is its falling in ſo exactly with *both* the prevailing vices of the age.

It is often difficult, I acknowledge, to aſcertain, in caſes of this kind, how far the Syſtem has impreſſed its character upon the Times; or how far the Times have given credit and currency to the Syſtem. If, in the preſent inſtance, the Syſtem has only been accommodated to the propenſities of the Times, our ſituation is much more deſperate than I am willing to ſuppoſe, or prepared to conſider: but if, as I wiſh to believe, the temper of the Times has been affec-

ted

ted by the prevalence of the Syſtem, there is room to hope, that with the removal of the cauſe, the evil will abate; and it is under the influence of this hope, that I have ventured again to ſubmit this Pamphlet to the Public—not in the expectation, certainly, that any thing which I can offer will have any material effect, (I am far from that preſumption), but with the intent that it may ſtimulate others to exertion, who are more likely to make a powerful and permanent impreſſion on the public mind.

Ipſwich, April 12, 1799.

4. OC 58

Erratum. Page 39, line 2 from b. for *millenium* read millennium.

An EXAMINATION, &c.

I Think, my dear Friend, it was at our laſt meeting in town, that the converſation turned on what we called, for want of a better title, The NEW SYSTEM OF MORALS. In our opinion of the real temper and character of this Syſtem, and of its ſure effects on the whole ſcheme of human life and manners, we were perfectly agreed; but we wanted leiſure to trace its origin and ſift its pretenſions with that accuracy, and to that extent, which, in my eagerneſs on the occaſion, I could very anxiouſly have deſired.

As a curious, becauſe an idle obſerver of what is paſſing in the world, this Syſtem, you know, has long attracted my attention; and unleſs I am deluded, beyond all cure from reaſon and reflection, it affords a ſubject for very ſerious meditation. Our condition is no longer to be diſſembled: It has long

been creeping upon us in ſilence and obſcurity; it ſhould ſeem, from various prognoſtics, to have very nearly touched its criſis; and ſtands without any of that ſort of parallel in former times, which will enable us to form a conjecture of its iſſue. Amidſt a ſteady, radical, confirmed decay, approaching, from every ſymptom, to a total breaking up, of that religion, and, together with the religion, of that peculiar caſt of morals and of manners, which gave its diſtinguiſhing character to modern Europe; combined with a diſſemination of knowledge through all claſſes, unexampled in the hiſtory of man, quickening the whole maſs into a new activity, and inſpiring, as new attainments ever will, a ſelf-confidence and impatient diſdain of all control upon the ſovereignty of reaſon—ariſes a Syſtem exactly accommodated to this eventful change; profeſſing an excluſive right to direct the whole of human conduct; at war, in its eſſence, with every other corrective; and placing its own efficacy ſolely in the free and enlightened ſpeculations of each individual on the general welfare.

The portentous aſpect of this Syſtem, and the conjuncture in which it has appeared, are not more remarkable than the incidental circumſtances

ſtances by which its progreſs has been favoured. Its vital principle—the principle which gives being and force to all its doctrines in all their extent—has never been regarded as peculiar to itſelf, nor examined in the ſpirit which ſuch a view of it would naturally have excited: it has crept, on the contrary, unobſerved, into general favour; it ſtands avowed and accredited as a certain truth, by all the leading authorities of the day; and has formed as ſecure a lodgment in the public mind, as the moſt ſanguine votary of this Syſtem could deſire. The conſequences reſulting from this principle, and compoſing what I ſhall take the liberty of calling the Syſtem itſelf, have not been brought before the public all at once and in full body and array; they have ſtolen ſucceſſively upon us, in different groups, from different quarters, under various diſguiſes, and in all the diverſities of form, from the ſubtle and ſpecious inſinuation at which the ſcrupulous might ſtartle without diſtinctly knowing what to condemn, to the bold and unqualified concluſion at which the moſt adventurous ſpirit might be ſtaggered. It has been impoſſible to bring this Proteus to any ſort of reckoning: if it was defeated in one ſhape, it ſtarted up in another; if you grappled with it this moment, in the terrific

guiſe

guiſe of defiance, it won upon you the next, in all the blandiſhments of affection, or diſarmed your reſentment with the ſuppliant tones of perſecuted innocence. The moſt zealous advocates of this Syſtem, have never been diſtinctly agreed on what they were proceeding or what they would be at. Some have embraced more of the ſcheme, ſome leſs; ſome have attacked one obſtacle, ſome another; in one way or other, however, their induſtry has been perfectly unwearied; it has been animated by the ſame ſpirit, it has tended to the ſame iſſue, and has had all the *effect*, at leaſt, of correſpondence. Their courtſhip has been of a kind the moſt difficult to reſiſt. They have taken their ſtand on motives the moſt honourable to themſelves, and the moſt ſeductive to their auditors—the good of human kind and an anxiety to reform the principles and inſtitutions on which its happineſs depends: they have addreſſed themſelves to the moſt generous and to the moſt flattering of the paſſions—to our love of truth, of independence, and liberal enquiry; to our abhorrence of craft, impoſition, and ſervile prejudice: no vehicle of zeal has been neglected: the ſolemnity of narrative, the ſubtlety of diſquiſition, the charms of poetry, and the deluſions of romance, have all been preſſed into the ſervice; and criticiſm has been

been perplexed by the various modes in which the aſſault has been conducted, the purity of the motives on which it has been urged, and the indiſtinct diſcloſure of what it was propoſed to ſubſtitute in the yawning void of what it was ſo anxiouſly laboured to deſtroy.

Under theſe circumſtances, I have always conſidered the appearance of Mr. Godwin's Political Juſtice, as an event the moſt deſirable that could have happened. With all its apparent novelty of argument and raſhneſs of concluſion, his work is in truth and ſubſtance nothing more than a complete digeſt of the New Syſtem of Morals, reduced to its firſt elements, drawn out in its true form, and applied to a ſubject of all others the beſt adapted to diſplay its genuine character and temper. The leading principle which he profeſſes through his whole Enquiry, is preciſely that which has informed and guided all his predeceſſors: this principle he has diſtinctly ſtated and avowed: and by purſuing it, not in the perverſe ſpirit of a ſatiriſt, but with the honeſt zeal of a true votary, to its extreme and revolting conſequences, he has taught the moſt inconſiderate to ponder a little, on what grounds they were acting, and in what project they were engaged. For-

mer

mer writers in the ſame cauſe have been ſhort-ſighted, or timid, or reſerved: Mr. Godwin labours under none of theſe defects: what he has deliberately adopted, he has dared ſagaciouſly to follow; and what he has dared to follow, he has had the ſpirit to avow: we are indebted to that ſpirit; it has granted us all we wanted; it has fulfilled the prayer of Ajax; and if we are doomed to ſink under this miſchief, we ſhall at leaſt have the ſatisfaction not to periſh in the dark.

In entreating your attention, then, to the fundamental principle of Mr. Godwin's Syſtem, you will do me the juſtice to believe, that it is only in this view of it, and conſidered as the baſis of the New Syſtem of Morals, that I eſteem it at all deſerving your regard. If I am miſtaken in this opinion, I have of courſe engaged in a very idle Enquiry; if I am right, (and no man is better qualified to determine this queſtion than yourſelf,) I know you too well to ſuppoſe that you will be deterred by the apparent barrenneſs of the topic, or the neglect in which it has been ſuffered to reſt, from giving it your very ſerious conſideration.

Let us attend therefore, to Mr. Godwin's Scheme of Morals, as he has ventured very luminouſly

nouſly to expoſe it, in the courſe of his Political Enquiry.

This Syſtem opens with a radical poſition, That we are bound in *juſtice* to do all the good we can; and that all moral duty therefore is compriſed in Juſtice. It is juſt to do all the good we can; it is unjuſt not to do all the good we can. Being bound in juſtice to do all the good we poſſibly can, the only juſt motive for preferring either our own good to that of others, or, of other perſons, the good of any one individual to that of any other, muſt be a ſenſe of the ſuperior quantity of good which that individual, whether it be ourſelves or another, is capable of producing; becauſe, by purſuing this plan only, can we produce all the poſſible good in our power; whatever therefore leads us to prefer either ourſelves or others upon a different account, is immoral and unjuſt. To execute this grand deſign of producing all the good in our power, by ourſelves or through others, we muſt be perfectly free from reſtraint, too, as well as bias; all promiſes, oaths, contracts, &c.—whatever blindly determines us to act in any definite way—ſhould not be allowed therefore, or not regarded: if they do *not* lead

us

us to deviate from the only right line of conduct—that of producing all the good poſſible—they are uſeleſs; if they do, they are immoral and unjuſt. Beſides a freedom from reſtraint and bias, a knowledge of truth, alſo, is neceſſary to enable us to be juſt: truth therefore ſhould at all times and under all circumſtances be ſpoken; and ſecreſy, prudential reſerve, delicate concealment, &c. ſhould have no place in the world. The moral as well as phyſical order of things being equally governed by neceſſity, virtue can be approved only on the ſame principle that we approve a fertile vale; and vice diſapproved, as we diſapprove an infectious diſtemper; as the cauſe of good, and as the cauſe of evil: rewards and puniſhments muſt be regarded only as a means, and that an irrational one, of reforming error; which can be effectually cured only by an infuſion of truth: and reſentment, remorſe, and affliction for paſt events, muſt be extinguiſhed from the face of the earth. In fine, the truly wiſe and juſt man, will be actuated neither by intereſt nor ambition, the love of honour, the deſire of fame, nor emulation; the good of the whole, will be his only object; this good he will inceſſantly purſue, and the purſuit of it will

conſtitute

conſtitute his happineſs,—a happineſs, which nothing but bodily pain, and ſcarcely that, can diſturb.*

Nothing, you ſee, can be more thoroughly conſiſtent. Allow the firſt poſition, (and it has every prepoſſeſſion in its favour,) and all the inferences follow ſo clearly and irreſiſtibly, that it ſeems impoſſible to elude their force, however ſubverſive they may be of the principles which have hitherto governed the conduct of mankind.

If we are bound in Juſtice to do all the good in our power, to produce the greateſt ſum of happineſs in ſentient nature, which it is within the compaſs of our faculties to effect—Then, doubtleſs, Juſtice being altogether an inflexible duty, admitting no diſpenſation, no remiſſion, no, not for a moment, our whole mind muſt be ſolely directed to this ſingle purpoſe; and the deſire to effect it, muſt conſtitute the only legitimate motive of human action. Then whatever leads us to act upon any other incitement, or with any other view, muſt be extirpated or ſubdued, as revolting againſt the rules of Juſtice. Then

* See Pol. Jus. 4to. Edit. paſſim; and particularly B. 2, c. 2, and 6; B. 3, c. 3; B. 4, c. 4, 5, 6; B. 6, c. 5; B. 7, and B. 8.

every paſſion and emotion of the human heart muſt be extinguiſhed as abhorrent to our duty; it being in the eſſence of all affections of this kind to prompt us to act upon particular motives, ſometimes not apparently conducive to the general good, and never certainly grounded upon it. Then patriotiſm, friendſhip, gratitude, affection, pity, all the public and private virtues, all the ſocial and domeſtic charities, which have hitherto been conſidered as the beſt bleſſings and ſureſt hope, as well as the grace and ornament of our nature, muſt be effectually rooted from our feelings, as creating an unjuſt preference in favour of certain individuals, or deſcriptions of individuals, independently of their diſpoſition and their power to co-operate with us in promoting the general good. Then whatever obſtructs us in the purſuit of this good, is an abateable nuiſance. All determinate rules are blind reſtrictions. All legal property is inveterate injuſtice: I have a right to juſt as much as I conceive will beſt enable me to accompliſh my grand project; and nobody has a right to any other portion, upon any other title. All law is uſurpation upon reaſon: all judicial proceſs, fetters and oppreſſion: prevailing ſentiments and manners, antiquated prejudice.—If we accept

the

the principle, we muſt take the conſequences—they are potentially included.

It is to this rigid dependence (though we might have expected a very different effect from it) that we muſt aſcribe the total want of any thing like a deciſive refutation, or even maſterly review, of a Syſtem which has certainly excited ſome curioſity. Thoſe who have engaged in this taſk, though otherwiſe fully equal to it, have not given themſelves patience to unravel the web in which they were entangled. They were embarraſſed. From poſitions too obvious for examination, they had been gradually led on to concluſions at which human reaſon revolts: repelled from the extremities, they ſlowly meaſured back their ſteps to the original principle—all was ſound, all was water-tight; not a cranny, not a chink, for truth to ſlip out, or error to creep in; till, in deſpair of tracing the leak, they injudiciouſly endeavoured at a compromiſe; they approved the Syſtem in part, they condemned it in part: the root was ſound, the branches vigorous, the foliage fair, but the fruit—was the apple of Sodom—

——"Bitter aſhes; which th' offended taſte"
"With ſpattering noiſe rejected."

That

That Syſtem will not be ſo treated. Without chewing theſe cinders, nothing can be clearer than that the whole ſcheme is of a piece, one and indiviſible; and that as one and indiviſible, it muſt be admitted or rejected. If the fundamental principle be true, if it be true that morality conſiſts in producing all the good we can, I admit that all the conſequences are clear, concatenated, and of irreſiſtible conviction. Arachne never wove a juſter web. If the fundamental principle be falſe, the whole is falſe; and the farther we advance, the more we are bewildered.

On what grounds is it ſo confidently aſſumed and implicitly admitted, that we are bound as moral agents to act on the principle of producing all the good in our power?

It cannot, I am ſure, eſcape you, that what gives force to this principle, and, through this principle, as I conceive, to the whole body of the New Syſtem of Morals, is the opinion which has lately prevailed, that virtue conſiſts altogether in utility—that it is the beneficial or pernicious tendency of any action, which alone conſtitutes it virtuous or vicious. If virtue is indeed only another name for the utility of an action, I am bound

bound to look to utility, and to utility only, as a teſt of moral rectitude; and, ſetting aſide every other conſideration, to act, as I mean to be virtuous, on the ſole principle of producing all the good in my power. I cannot refuſe myſelf to this conſequence. Here then—and I muſt beg you to fix your attention very diſtinctly on this point—I am fairly at iſſue with the advocates of the New Syſtem of Morals, by directly denying, that moral diſtinction does in fact originate from a ſenſe of the tendency of its objects to promote or thwart the general good, or that it is practicable, as a project, to deduce it from this ſource.

I have conſidered this notion of virtue, though now ſo familiar, as of late introduction. It certainly is ſo. The cauſe of moral diſtinction, as a curious and important phenomenon, has of courſe at all times exerciſed the enquiries of the reflecting part of mankind: till within the preſent century I am pretty confident it has never been referred to this proſpective view of its tendency. Of the antient moraliſts I certainly do not recollect one, who has accounted for it in this way. The object of theſe teachers, indeed, was not morality merely, in the confined ſenſe in which we uſe that term, but the art of living happily: as conducive

ducive to a happy life, however, the doctrine of morals could not well be neglected; and it was accordingly inculcated by all, from Epicurus who regarded it as auxiliary to what he perverſely called pleaſure, to Zeno, who exalted it into the ſupreme and ultimate good itſelf: the occaſion was certainly fair for reſolving virtue into utility; yet ſo far were they from regarding it in that light, that amongſt the various topics which they urged, and with ſuch diverſified addreſs, to intereſt the human heart in its favour, its ultimate ſubſervience to the general advantage, is but faintly to be recognized. If we deſcend to the later moraliſts, who have indulged much more freely in ſpeculations of this kind than their predeceſſors, the beneficial tendency of virtue was by no means the firſt of its properties which engroſſed attention: its agreement with the law of nature, its congeniality to the perceptions of a moral taſte, its conformity to certain eternal and immutable relations and differences of things, its correſpondence with truth—as I need not quote the earlier Writers on public law, nor Lord Shafteſbury, nor Dr. Clarke, nor Mr. Wollaſton, to prove—were, all of them, characteriſtics, real or imaginary, which had previouſly been adopted.

Utility

Utility, though not the firſt quality of virtue which engroſſed attention, ſeems however, when once fairly brought forward, to have been of all others the beſt adapted to intereſt and ſecure it. It was a property of virtue not to be diſputed; it gave, or ſeemed to give, a very clear and natural account of the origin of moral diſtinction; it promiſed to ſupply a ready and deciſive teſt by which this diſtinction might ever after be accurately aſcertained; and it furniſhed an argument in its favour, which, if not the moſt powerful in its recommendation, was at leaſt the moſt unanſwerable in its defence.

The Syſtem of philoſophy advanced by Mr. Locke,—a Syſtem the moſt level to common apprehenſion, the moſt applicable to common life, and eventually the moſt popular and operative that was ever offered to the world,—by exploding all occult principles either of belief or action, and reducing the latter, ſimply to a deſire of perſonal pleaſure and averſion to perſonal pain, as it reſolved the former, into a perception in each individual of the agreement or diſagreement of his ideas, had fully prepared the public mind for the reception of this doctrine. Perſonal ſenſitive pleaſure and pain being the only perceptions

tions that can poſſibly intereſt us, and the ſole ſprings of all our paſſions and actions, it is only as it affects us, or is capable of affecting us, with one or other of theſe ſenſations that any object can furniſh ground for practical diſtinction: good and evil can be nothing but the cauſes of pleaſure and pain; and moral good and evil, but theſe cauſes operating in a moral agent; whoſe ſentiments and actions we accordingly denominate virtuous or vicious, as they poſſeſs the one or the other of theſe tendencies. Such ſeems the train of thought which led to this concluſion: and as the conſtitution of nature viſibly conſpired with this hypotheſis, as virtue was in fact productive of good and vice of evil, no doubt ſeems to have been entertained of the juſtneſs of a theory which was adopted with equal confidence by the ſoundeſt advocates of Chriſtianity, under the authority of Dr. Law,[1] Dr. Brown,[2] and Dr. Paley,[3] on the one hand; and by the moſt unequivocal atheiſts, under the lead of Hume[4] and Helvetius[5] on the other. In the conſtruction

1. Vid. his edit. of Abp. King's Origin of Evil: Prelim. Tracts and Notes.

2. Vid. his Eſſays on the Characteriſtics: Eſſay 2d.

3. Vid. his Mor. and Polit. Phi.

4. Vid. his Enquiry into the Principles of Morals.

5. Vid. his Treatiſes ſur l'Eſprit & ſur l'Homme.

and

and application of ſo important a principle, it was not to be expected that characters ſo uncongenial ſhould thoroughly agree. By the religioniſts, it was employed to afford a rational account of moral diſtinction, as it ſtood, and to impreſs a juſter ſenſe of its importance; while the divine will, which whether manifeſted in its works or declared in its revelations evidently concurred in the ſame benevolent deſign, was adduced to interpret the law and enforce its obligation: by the philoſophers, it was eagerly ſeized as a new and rational explication of a popular prejudice, and applied with all zeal to the derivation of an improved code of morals from the ſpring-head of general good: but in the principle itſelf, of deducing moral diſtinction from its conſequences, both parties appear to have ſubſtantially agreed; and when you conſider the ſeparate influence of each, you will not be ſurpriſed that they ſhould have left, between them, ſcarcely any other notion of virtue or vice prevailing in the world.

Is it poſſible, my dear Friend, that it can require much profound thought or many words to refute a principle, which, but for its general re-

ception (a powerful claim to reſpect no doubt) would hardly deſerve a ſerious examination?

What does this axiom aſſume? It takes for granted, and it is the only circumſtance which gives the colour of plauſibility to the poſition, that becauſe the end of virtue is the general good (as it is undoubtedly, and of every other principle moulded into the compoſition of phyſical and moral nature) that it is its tendency to this end, which determines us to diſtinguiſh it as virtue; that becauſe the final cauſe of moral diſtinction is utility, that utility muſt be its proximate cauſe alſo;—an aſſumption, which, without any ſort of internal evidence in its favour, (as an abſtract propoſition it is impoſſible that it ſhould have any) is directly controverted by the very proof which we ſhould naturally expect to find adduced in its ſupport—the preſumptions, I mean, and ſometimes very ſtrong ones, which may be drawn from analogy. We are actuated to various ends by various principles; by more perhaps than a ſuperficial obſerver will ſuppoſe or allow. After a pretty careful review of this ſubject—it is one of the moſt curious and inſtructive in the circle of contemplative

templative enquiry—I may venture to affirm that there is no ſingle inſtance, no, not the minuteſt, in the whole moral œconomy of man, in which the end to be attained, is, as this axiom preſumes, the motive appointed to attain it. Let us take the moſt familiar caſes that can occur. The end of eating and drinking is the ſuſtenance of our bodies; do we eat and drink for that purpoſe? The end of the union of the ſexes is the propagation of the ſpecies; do we unite with that view? The end of parental affection is the preſervation of helpleſs infancy; do we love our children on that account? The ultimate end here, too, is the general good; does it form any part of the incitement? In dealing with each other, we wiſely copy nature, and never dream of attaining any end through the agency of others, by kindling in thoſe agents an immediate paſſion for that end. The end of civil government is the maintenance of ſocial intercourſe with all the advantages which have ſprung from human ſociety, and the functions of its moſt ſubordinate miniſters are eſſential to its ſupport: Did the moſt viſionary enthuſiaſt ever preſume, that all the tipſtaves and catchpoles in the State ſhould be prompted to their duty by a zeal for the great objects which they no doubt

contribute

contribute to promote? It is not to *important* ends only that we are ſtimulated in this way, by immediate motives entirely diſtinct from the deſire to attain them; we are often affected in the ſame manner where the propoſed end of that affection is either not diſcoverable, or if diſcoverable, appears comparatively trivial, as might be inſtanced in our love of harmony, of uniformity, of order, and of beauty out of our own ſpecies: Would it not be a little extraordinary, that purpoſes of ſuch high moment as thoſe which reſult from moral diſtinction—purpoſes too in many caſes exceedingly remote, ſhould be abandoned to the proviſions of a forecaſt, to anticipations of ultimate utility, to which no one object beſides in the whole human œconomy has been entruſted?

But what avails analogy, when the poſition is refuted as a fact by the univerſal ſenſe of mankind? If it is the utility of an action which conſtitutes it virtuous, we muſt all be conſcious of it. It is abſolutely impoſſible that we ſhould be miſtaken in our feelings, however we may be miſled in our reaſonings about them. Turn then to the writers who ſpeak the language of nature and truth, the poets and orators of all ages. Are the virtues they celebrate ever aſcribed to this motive,

motive, are they ever exalted in this view, are they ever recommended on this principle? Nothing leſs. Look into the hiſtorians; they expreſs exactly the ſame ſentiments. The deaths of Socrates and Seneca were worthy of their lives; and ſhed, beyond all queſtion, a ray of intereſt over their courſe, which the higheſt noon of their aſcendant never equalled: What apparent connection is there between the unſhaken fortitude and philoſophic calmneſs which overpower us with awful admiration in the dying moments of theſe great teachers of morality, and the general happineſs of mankind? In actions which affect this happineſs much more directly, their tendency to promote it, ſeems to conſtitute no ingredient in the motive of the agent, or the approbation of the ſpectator. Hiſtory and tradition teem with the applauſes of thoſe heroes who have devoted every thing dear to life, and life itſelf, for the ſalvation of their country. The ſpirit of patriotiſm, which animated theſe perſonages to ſuch high exploits, is totally diſtinct from general philanthropy, and a ſenſe of the ultimate ſubſervience of their conduct to univerſal good. A genuine patriot would eſtabliſh the proſperity of his country on the ruin of every State which obſtructs it; nor is he always remarkable for an exquiſite

exquiſite ſenſibility towards the perſonal and domeſtic ſufferings even of the individuals who compoſe the corporate body he eſpouſes. It is the good of the *State* which the patriot affects; its wealth, its ſtrength, its conſideration in the eyes of mankind; almoſt any thing rather than the phyſical happineſs of its inhabitants, which he is ever ready to ſacrifice, with very little compunction, to the attainment of theſe objects. This happineſs, and the general happineſs, I believe to be promoted by theſe means; but theſe means are not adopted nor applauded with that view. In ſurveying the atchievements of a Leonidas, or Regulus, or Cato, it is not the effects, it is the motives, of their conduct which expand us with rapture—what intereſt have *we* in the fortunes of unknown multitudes in Rome or Greece, who might chance to derive a benefit from their exploits? No, it is the command and greatneſs of ſoul which fortified theſe immortal patriots to make ſuch mighty ſacrifices in a common cauſe, that extorts our admiration, and will enſure it to their memory, while the world endures. If we looked to the utility of actions as a teſt of their merit, the inventor of the common wind-mill would eclipſe in ſplendour all the worthies of antiquity—in the durability

bility and diffuſion of his beneficence, there is no ſort of compariſon between them ; and he is buried, if that circumſtance were of force to exalt utility into virtue, in a reaſonable depth of years. But ſo far are we from eſtimating virtue on this principle, that if a man could bring himſelf, by any effort, to perform any one of the virtues with this view, to diſcharge, for example, very punctually, all the duties of gratitude and humanity, without any of the ordinary motives to ſuch actions, without any kind of grateful emotion or fellow feeling, but purely from a conviction of the ultimate tendency of ſuch conduct to promote the general good—I put it home to your breaſt, aud that of every man living—notwithſtanding all we might affect to ſay or endeavour to think, and though he might be actuated (with Dr. Paley) by the proſpect of everlaſting happineſs into the bargain, he would be an object to us rather of diſguſt and averſion. Like the ſtarch and ſpiritleſs efforts of what ſchool-boys term *painting* in penmanſhip, his character would want all that charm of freedom, grace and vigour, which the original energies of nature can alone inſpire.

There

There is no eſcaping from this teſt. If it is contended that we indeed approve of virtue on other grounds, but that it conſiſts in utility, the whole queſtion is ſurrendered. Virtue can be nothing but what affects us as virtue; and, which, as affecting us in that particular way, mankind have agreed to denominate by that particular title. If we are ſpeaking of any thing elſe, we ſhould adopt another name. All that ſuch a diſtinction can poſſibly mean therefore is this, that the reſult of what affects us as virtue is the general utility, but that it affects us as virtue on a different account; that the appointed end of moral diſtinction is the general good, but that its efficient cauſe is ſomething totally ſeparate from all conſideration of that effect. I contend for nothing more. All I charge upon the Syſtem which derives virtue from utility, is the ſubſtituting this effect for that cauſe; the ultimate deſtination for the proximate motive; and thus treating morality as an academician of Lagado* might be ſuppoſed to deal with the common functions of life, who rejecting the calls of appetite as brute inſtincts, ſhould recommend us in

* See a Viſit to this Academy, Gulliver's Travels, Voyage to Laputa, c. 5.

his

his project to eat and drink and ſleep, not from the vulgar motives of hunger, thirſt, or drowſineſs, but conformably to our reſearches into the intended effect of theſe operations on the animal œconomy.

Let the real cauſe of our moral ſentiments be what it may (we ſhall recur to this cauſe hereafter) the reſult of ſuch an inverted proceſs, whether aſſumed as a fact, or advanced as a ſpeculation, can be nothing but error and deluſion. We meet, in truth, with nothing elſe. All the prepoſterous, all the revolting, all the laughable, conſequences, which a Swift would have exhibited in grave detail to reflect eternal deriſion on the ſource from whence they came, are formally deduced by Mr. Godwin as wonderful diſcoveries imbibed from this precious ſpring of all moral and political truth.

It would be too much to aſk you to purſue theſe wanderers from the high road of nature through all the mazes of their error; but it may be worth while to remark the principal difficulties by which they are beſet, and the Serbonian bog on which they open.

Virtue, then, we will ſay, conſiſts in utility; and aſpiring to be virtuous, to my means, I am bound to be as uſeful as I can,—I am bound to produce all the good in my power. This injunction has a very impoſing air undoubtedly, but where does it leave us? As huſband, father of a family, friend, member of ſociety, in theſe, or in any ſtation or condition of life, what ſort of direction does it afford me? To the perſpicacious and preſcient eye, which could ſurvey at a glance all the modes of beneficence in which it is poſſible to act, and purſue the reſult of ſuch actions to the remoteſt ramifications of their conſequences, the path of duty, under ſuch a precept, might be viſible, I admit; but what track could be diſcovered in this boundleſs expanſe by the confined views and dim foreſight of man? I muſt ſpend all my life, agreeably to this ſcheme, in ſpeculation, before I could ſafely take the firſt ſtep. I muſt conſume years in determining, according to the multiplicity and complication of exiſting circumſtances, *that* to be right, which a change in thoſe circumſtances, the moment after, might render totally wrong. The rule is a moſt incomparable rule, but it is impoſſible to put it into practice. This "palpable obſcure" this "reign" "of Chaos and old night" thus ſpread over the whole

whole plan and conduct of life, is however not without its uſe. It leaves us entirely open to the direction of any projector. All is darkneſs; and he is at liberty to guide us by any lights he can furniſh.

I am bound to produce all the good in my power—but by what incitements is it propoſed to ſtimulate me in this arduous duty? The general good, I will allow, is an object highly deſireable; and though ſtripped of all that can impart a lively intereſt to it, of time and place and perſon and circumſtance, there is no man, I wiſh to believe, ſo ſtrangely malevolent, who would not give it, when fairly brought before him in a moment of eaſe and reflection, his heartieſt good wiſhes, or even concur in any reaſonable plan to promote it. All this I readily admit: but to convert this remote regard into the primary principle of all action, is quite a different affair. Such a ſcheme muſt neceſſarily be deluſive, becauſe it controverts, at its outſet, the ſtrongeſt inſtincts of our nature; becauſe it is at war with what neither mortal ſtrength nor ſubtlety can aboliſh or ſupplant; and grounds its ſucceſs on the extinction of powers, which fanaticiſm may counteract, indeed, but never can extirpate. We cannot

cannot change our nature. By a law of that nature, we proceed from perſonal affection to general regard: from the love of offspring, of kindred, of neighbours, and acquaintance, to that of our diſtrict, our community, our country, and our kind. In this order our affections are diffuſed; and in this order, by the conſtitution of our being, they weaken as they ſpread.

" God loves from whole to parts: but human ſoul
" Muſt riſe from individual to the whole.
" Self love but ſerves the virtuous mind to wake,
" As the ſmall pebble ſtirs the peaceful lake;
" The centre moved, a circle ſtrait ſucceeds,
" Another ſtill, and ſtill another ſpreads;
" Friend, parent, neighbour, firſt it will embrace;
" His country next; and next all human race."

Sings Pope, as he winds up his Eſſay on Man, with the correctneſs of a philoſopher and the ſpirit of a poet. In vain we endeavour to think otherwiſe; in vain we act as if otherwiſe we thought: the original feeling remains, and cannot be ſubdued. The warmeſt philanthropiſt would eat his dinner with good appetite, though one of the Philippines, with all its inhabitants, were ſwallowed by an earthquake, or the plague were raging on the ſhores of the Helleſpont; and would

would weep in bittereſt affliction at the untimely death of his only child. I am not contending that this diſpoſition of things is right. It is not the place to do it. Let him who dares, arraign it. But I maintain it is the fact; and a fact which, without a violence on nature, we cannot alter. To invert this natural ſeries, to transform the laſt and remoteſt extenſion of our regards into the original ſpring from which we are to derive all others,—to do more—to ſet it up as the only legitimate principle of action, ſuperſeding every other motive and every moral corrective on theſe motives, is ſheer infatuation. Let us ſee to what it leads.

I am bound to produce all the good in my power. I am bound then to act upon this principle only, to have this object perpetually before me, and to purſue it with all the faculties I poſſeſs. I am bound, of courſe, to diſcard every other principle of action as immoral and unjuſt, and to extinguiſh or ſubdue, as much as in me lays, every paſſion and inſtinct of my nature, to make way for the operation of this grand precept. I muſt not till my farm, nor marry a wife, nor rear my children, from the common motives of profit, love, or affection, but from a conviction

that

that by ſo acting I ſhall beſt promote the general good. For how can I promote that good to the utmoſt of my power, unleſs in each particular act, at each particular moment, I do my utmoſt to promote it? And how can I be ſaid to promote it at all, unleſs I act with that deſign? Since as to any good that may caſually reſult from my conduct (and caſually it muſt reſult if I act from any other motive), I can no more be ſaid to have produced it, than I can be affirmed to have ſaved the life which my poſthumous ſon ſaved, becauſe I begot him. Morality, on this ſcheme, is not an occaſional alterative, but our conſtant diet. I muſt not ſtir a ſtep, but from a conviction, that, of all the poſſible modes of action, it is the one moſt conducive to the general welfare.

Dr. Paley * has endeavoured to obviate theſe difficulties by ſuppoſing the eſtabliſhment of certain

* It is painful to ſpeak with diſapprobation of a writer, for whoſe candour, liberality, learning, and ſound ſenſe, I feel the higheſt reſpect: but when I reflect that theſe very qualities have given credit—not merely with the world at large, whoſe opinions, as they are often lightly formed, are as lightly abandoned; but at one, at leaſt, of thoſe Seats of Learning in which our ingenuous youth receive the impreſſions which are to guide them through life—to a principle ſo per-

tain general rules, commanding what is right upon the whole, forbidding what upon the whole is wrong; and thus acting in a ſort of mediatorial capacity between the general expediency and particular meaſures, the general expediency determining the obligation to the general rule, and the general rule determining the morality or immorality of the particular action †. This is certainly a very ingenious attempt to ſtem the torrent of evil conſequences flowing from the principle he has adopted; but I fear it will be found a moſt incompetent barrier. Let us look at the inſtances he cites, to prove the neceſſity of theſe rules; and to ſhow that an action which conſidered in itſelf is uſeful, and

pernicious, "that I muſt always conſider the correctives which" "might make it in any degree practicable, to be ſo many new objec-" "tions to it", I cannot prevail on myſelf to paſs unnoticed the moſt plauſible of theſe correctives, as propounded by the ableſt advocate of the principle itſelf. It is but juſtice to remark, that Dr. Paley did not draw this principle from the ſources I ſuppoſed in my former edition of this Letter; but that he adopted his celebrated definition of virtue, verbatim, from the venerable and learned Prelate * to whom he inſcribes his work.

* Dr. Edmund Law, late Biſhop of Carliſle: See the 2d Tract prefixed to his edit. of Abp. King's Origin of Evil, and Note λ in the 3d pt. of his Theory of Religion.

† See Mor. and Pol. Phi. B. 2, c. 6, 7, and 8.

there-

therefore right and virtuous, changes its character, and aſſumes the quality of vice, merely becauſe it violates them. I deſpatch a powerful oppreſſor; or rob a miſer, and give his money to the needy—have I acted right? No; ſays Dr. Paley: the act conſidered in itſelf is uſeful; but it violates a general rule againſt murder and robbery: murder and robbery have not always the ſame excuſes: now you cannot permit one action, and forbid another, without ſhewing a difference between them *. A difference! But I ſhew the greateſt difference poſſible: my action was confeſſedly uſeful—therefore right; thoſe to which you refer it, confeſſedly pernicious—therefore wrong. Can there be a greater difference? If another man does wrong, am I to be debarred the privilege of doing right, becauſe, forſooth, the two caſes chance to have ſome phyſical, irrelevant reſemblance; and you are ſo dull and undiſtinguiſhing that you cannot draw a line between them? Is nothing to be done that ingenious malice may imitate to ill? Is charity to be nipped, becauſe the ſeducer may corrupt: is public ſpirit to be quelled, becauſe the demagogue affects it: and virtue, from the

* See Mor. and Pol. Phi. B. 2, c. 6. & 7.

awful

awful corrector, to be degraded into the timid ſervitor of vice? Who are you, to ſtint the exerciſe of my diffuſive benevolence by your general rules? The deed which I committed, I was bound by general expediency to perform, before your rules had being: thoſe rules are arbitrary: they are, from your own account of them, the creatures of expediency: they have not a grain of worth or credit in them, which they do not derive from this ſource: do you pretend to deduce from general expediency inferior orders to forbid that, which general expediency itſelf, and at firſt hand, enjoins me to accompliſh? I admit that your general rules, crude and undiſtinguiſhing as they are, would be better than no rules at all, if no other guide exiſted: but I have the teſt by which thoſe rules are triable, and on whoſe judgment they muſt ſtand or fall: give me rules conforming to this teſt; rules which declare what, on all occaſions, and under all circumſtances, it is right to do, or to abſtain from doing—give me theſe, or give me none. It would be impoſſible, I think, to anſwer ſuch ſophiſtry on its own grounds; and—but that I wiſh to ſpare both you and myſelf the diſguſtful taſk of mooting ſuch deteſtable caſes—nothing would be eaſier than to ſhow, that no ſuch rules could poſſibly be

framed; ſince there is no deed, no, not the moſt atrocious and revolting, which a cool head, thoroughly diveſted of all feeling, might not conſider as highly expedient, under certain circumſtances, to the general good. The antipathy to all rules, is certainly in the principle of the New Syſtem of Morals; and thoſe who puſh this principle to its full extent, are perfectly conſiſtent.

Then what muſt be the effect of this Syſtem on the human character, and on all the means ſuggeſted by nature and matured by art, to correct, to cultivate, and to adorn it. Without furniſhing any diſcoverable plan of action, without enjoining any practicable duty, without propoſing any natural incentive, it proſcribes, in one ſweeping anathema, as the vile ſpawn of inveterate prejudice and antiquated error, all the principles, maxims, and inſtitutions, moral, civil, or ſocial, which have hitherto ſerved to regulate the whole of human life and manners. I will ſuppoſe the regulations, under each of theſe heads, to be in no one inſtance the beſt that could be framed; that in ſome caſes they are defective, that in ſome they are redundant, that in ſome they are abſurd: at the very worſt, they are better than no rules at all; they at leaſt put

me

me on my guard; they afford me ſomething to lay my account with, in my intercourſe with others. It is looked upon as diſcreditable to evade the payment of a juſt debt, as infamous to betray a confidential ſecret, and as profligate to ſeduce a wife or a daughter; and relying on my friend's regard for his character, I aſſiſt him with my purſe, I open family affairs to him, and give him the free range of my houſe. With a diſciple of Mr. Godwin I muſt be mad to do it. Some unruly inſtinct or paſſion, it would not be abſolutely incredulous to ſuppoſe, might ſtill remain lurking in his compoſition, in ſpite of the regenerative principles of Juſtice; and, at any rate, he might very conſiſtently with thoſe principles, and through a very conſcientious obſervance of them, defraud me of my money, divulge my boſom ſecrets to the world, and violate, according to his taſte, my partner or my child: with the money he may aſſiſt a brother philoſopher, with the ſecret he may benefit my neighbour, and by ſnapping aſunder the cords of conjugal connection, or abbreviating unproductive chaſtity, he may rationally hope to accelerate that happy intercommunity which conſtitutes one of the favourite characters of his philoſophical millenium. What ſecurity have I, that he may not act in any

of

of theſe ways? To me, at leaſt, his conduct is abſolutely capricious. The firſt article of his creed, is an utter contempt, mixed with abhorrence, for all the governing principles of life: and in this variegated and changing ſcene, where good and ill are ſo infinite in their kinds, ſo woven one into the other, and linked together in a ſucceſſion ſo inſcrutable to human foreſight, it is impoſſible to conjecture, in what he may chance to place the general good, by what meaſures he may think to promote it, and through what preſent evil he may not hope to work its final conſummation. All the benefit I may derive from his conduct is purely caſual; and againſt all the evil I may ſuffer from his philoſophical Quixotiſm, I have no ſort of ſecurity, but the miſerable protection of laws, which he abominates as ſhackles, and ſome lurking remains, perhaps, of common feeling, which he ſtruggles to ſuppreſs as repugnant to his duty. A vicious man, in the ordinary courſe of things, is vicious only in particular points: he is ſatirical, or debauched, or proud, or revengeful; and while we avail ourſelves in ſome degree of his good qualities, we may guard againſt the bad; but with the votaries of a Syſtem who think any means lawful in the purſuit of an end ſo abſtract, that any meaſures

ſures may be thought to promote it, one knows not how to act. It is like dealing with inſanity, where innocence is mingled with miſchief: nor is it eaſy to conceive, how ſocial intercourſe could be at all ſupported amidſt ſuch inevitable confuſion and diſtruſt.

This undiſtinguiſhing proſcription of all the received regulations of life, is not a remote conſequence, it is in the eſſence, of the New Syſtem of Morals. The genius of Pagan mythology, it has been juſtly remarked, was naturally mild and indulgent, becauſe a reverence for any particular ſcheme of it was perfectly conſiſtent with a reſpect for any other; while that of Chriſtianity was of courſe intolerant, becauſe its validity is incompatible with any other mode of faith, and its eſtabliſhment preſuppoſes their extinction. It is juſt the ſame with the project before us. It has all the excluſive ſpirit of inſpired truth, with all the wretched impotence of brainſick error. It enjoins inflexibly, as the ſole legitimate principle of action, what is utterly inconſiſtent with every other principle of action whatſoever. For theſe it can have no toleration, no forbearance. It can only thrive on their decline: it can only triumph in their deſtruction. The moſt enthuſiaſtic

ſtaſtic admirers of any particular virtues, may entertain at leaſt a decent reſpect for the reſt. They are lawful potentates, each in his domain; and may well reign together. But the Syſtem before us aſpires at univerſal deſpotiſm: it is the Lord of moral nature, or it is nothing: and proſcribes with equal jealouſy allies and rivals. The ſpirit of the ſcheme muſt affect the mind of the votary. To a profeſſor of this Syſtem, all that has paſſed for wiſdom in the world can appear as nothing better than fooliſhneſs; and the moſt revered and ſacred principles in the government of life, as at beſt but rattles to amuſe the infancy of reaſon. How can it be otherwiſe? Take theſe principles in any of their forms—in the municipal laws of the country—in traditionary uſages—in the inſtitutions which enforce both—in the prevailing ſentiments on morality—and the received maxims which regulate ſocial intercourſe amongſt us. The eſtabliſhed rules on theſe ſubjects have not been promulged by philoſophers from the cloſet; nor faſhioned by the imagination, where all is ductile, into thoſe regular ſhapes which the mind of man delights to form and to contemplate. Still leſs have they been conſtructed on an abſtract view of their ultimate tendency to the general good. In many in-

inſtances they are purely arbitrary, and derive all their value from their general recognition. In others, their reaſon, independently of their reception, is not always obviouſly clear. Some, and thoſe not the ſlighteſt in practical importance, may even appear in ſpeculation, and appear on that very account, irrational, irkſome, and oppreſſive. They have grown, for the moſt part, out of our common nature as influenced by our particular ſituation—that is, they have been the creatures of exigency: where they have not ſprung from the ſuggeſtions of our nature, they have in general been formed and matured, with the ſame imperfections in theory and advantage in practice, on an experience of its wants: and where neither nature nor reaſon can claim them as her offspring, where accident gave them being, and habit has retained them, they have at laſt acquired a value from adoption; they occupy a void till it is better ſupplied; and contribute, with the reſt, to the grand object of them all. This object, which is nothing more than the maintenance of the ſyſtem of life on its preſent footing, is preciſely the very grievance that exaſperates the philoſophers of the new ſect; and in the principles which thus promote this end, there are abundant provocatives to their

ſcorn and indignation. They operate by ordinary motives: they propoſe but trivial ends: they are altogether ſilent about the general happineſs of ſentient nature. To minds heated by the project of promoting this happineſs on a new and improved principle, whatever tends to make us content with our preſent condition, can appear in no other guiſe than as a tie to thraldom: the very circumſtance of its being adapted to its purpoſe, only irritates them the more; and all reſpect for ſuch deſpicable prejudices will be treated as nothing better than bondage to exploded error, and all enforcement of them by law, or by opinion, as an atrocious uſurpation on the ſovereignty of reaſon. Hatred, when intenſely inflamed by the blaſt of zeal, is the fierceſt of the paſſions; nor muſt we be ſurpriſed at the unbroken conſtancy, and infuriate ardour, with which the projectors of univerſal happineſs have urged, and reſumed, and rallied, and preſſed their aſſault on theſe inveterate obſtacles. The accompliſhment of their ſcheme, depends on their deſtruction. Mr. Godwin has tried his hand at a few of them: at gratitude—(I think), friendſhip, patriotiſm, parental affection, filial piety, confidence, fidelity, right of property, conjugal union—and ſome other of the antiquated follies

follies of former days. We have ſeen what he has propoſed to ſubſtitute.

The taſte of theſe gentlemen is truly marvellous. Grant them all they wiſh. Give them their heart's content. Allow them to have matured a race of beings preciſely to their notions; diſciples, who by dint of long meditation and ſtout effort, had effectually ſubdued in themſelves every affection whatever; and who, on all occaſions, acted only for the general good. What ſort of characters would they form? Place them in imagination before you. Conceive of them as neighbours, fellow-citizens, aſſociates, friends. What ſhould we think of an animal in any of theſe ſhapes, or in the ſhape of man, whom no intimacy could endear, no kindneſs attach, no miſery move, no injuries provoke, no beauty charm, no wit exhilirate; whoſe cold heart no ſorrows could thaw, no feſtivity warm; but who purſued, with inflexible perſeverance, ſome abſtract idea of the general good; dead to the glow of virtue; dead to the ſhame of vice; and calculating the degrees of rectitude, of poſthumous advantage over preſent ſuffering, by De Moivre upon chances. Taſtes may differ: but to my perceptions it is difficult to figure any

 being

being more thoroughly hideous and diſguſtful; more diſqualified for the enjoyment or diffuſion of any kind of happineſs; or more prepared to perpetrate what the human heart recoils at. Now, though we might not, as we certainly ſhould not, be able to attain, in full perfection, this unnatural and monſtrous perverſion of all ſentiment; though we ſhould never become, under this diſcipline, as perfectly wretched and deteſtable as it ſo anxiouſly labours to make us; though we ſhould never dive ſo deep in this "ſlough of deſpond," as entirely to deaden all ſenſibility to every thing which can intereſt and engage the human heart, and engender a feveriſh zeal for an object ſo remote and abſtract that it baffles ſpeculation, we might render ourſelves, by unrelenting effort, as odious and miſerable as our conſtitutions would allow.

And for what?—For the general good? But general good, after all, is but an aggregate of individual good; and our capacity to ſuffer and enjoy, remains preciſely as it was. Mr. Godwin furniſhes us with no ſixth ſenſe; he opens no new inlet to gratification; he diſcovers no *terra auſtralis* of delight, phyſical or moral, preſent or to come. All things ſtand exactly as

as they were; except, that inſtead of each man's providing for himſelf, he is to purvey for others; every body is to buſy himſelf in every body's buſineſs but his own; every body is to meddle in every thing but what he is competent to manage; all are to cater, and none to conſume; and in the mortification, confuſion, perplexity, diſtruſt, and deſpair, of each individual, is to conſiſt univerſal confidence, peace, plenty, ſecurity, and happineſs.

Such is this project in full expanſion and luxuriance, "with all its bluſhing honours thick" "upon it." I am far from ſaying, I repeat it, that it is capable of all the miſchief I have ſtated. Few ſchemes, either of good or ill, fully anſwer the deſigns of the contriver, or the prognoſtications of the critic. All theory which has human manners for its object, is ſo liable to deflection from the medium through which it acts, that it is extremely difficult to eſtimate its practical effects. Of all contrivances of this kind, however, that which bends its aim, like the preſent, at the ruling principles of human conduct, has the faireſt chance for ſucceſs. All other plans and inſtitutions deſigned to effect a change in the temper of mankind, operate indirectly: their

their proceſs is ſlow; the means circuitous; and the end, at laſt, but partial; *this* attacks at once the ſpring-head of action; and aſpires, by the only practicable method, at an entire regeneration of the human character. If it fails to attain its purpoſe moſt completely, it is no fault of the Syſtem: nor (for my own part) when I regard, even with the moſt indulgent eye, the ſtate of public manners and the public mind, can I fondly perſuade myſelf that we are fallen upon times ſo good, ſo full of a high ſenſe of perſonal dignity in the individual, and an exquiſite reſpect for the cultivated feelings of others; ſo alive to true glory and true ſhame; ſo noble ſpirited, ſo gallant, ſo ſuſceptible; ſo grounded in an incorruptible integrity ſublimed into honour, and accompliſhed in a generous courteſy exalted into worth, as to render an attempt to ſhed a palſy on the vital principle that feeds theſe ſentiments, a matter of abſolute indifference. It is no difficult achievement to precipitate the falling. But this is to myſelf.

Surely, my dear Friend, it is ſcarcely poſſible to avoid ſeeing, that the original ſin of the whole theory of morals which places virtue in utility, and which leads in its certain iſſue to all theſe ſhameful

ſhameful conſequences, conſiſts in conſidering as the reſult of reaſon, an effect which it is not in the competence of reaſon to produce. Mr. Godwin has laid down this fundamental error very diſtinctly. "To a rational being," ſays he, treating of the foundation of virtue,* "there can be but" "one rule of conduct, Juſtice; and one mode of" "aſcertaining that rule, the exerciſe of his un-" "derſtanding." On this ſcheme of morality, every thing, you ſee, is made dependent upon reaſon. But our moral ſentiments, which give at once being and force to moral diſtinction, cannot be the reſult of reaſon. The object of reaſon is, ſimply and excluſively, truth and falſehood: and all the effect which truth and falſehood can poſſibly produce upon the mind, is to excite a mere aſſent or diſſent as any propoſition appears under one or other of theſe characters. Wherever the mind is affected on any occaſion beyond this, we may univerſally affirm, and be perfectly ſure, that this effect proceeds from ſome cauſe entirely independent of the powers of reaſon. Whatever is ſuſceptible of truth or falſehood, is within the province of reaſon. Reaſon may inveſtigate the properties in any object by which theſe af-

* See Pol. Juſ. B. 2, c. 6.

fections

fections are produced, the relations of theſe properties with other parts of the Syſtem in which they act, or the effects they are deſigned to produce upon that Syſtem: but thoſe properties muſt previouſly have acted, to become a ſubject matter of enquiry; and muſt ſtill continue to act, independently of any ſpeculations reſpecting their nature, their relations, or their ultimate deſtination. Reaſon may be employed on ſubjects affecting the mind with any emotion, as well as upon lines and figures: but its effects, as reaſon, muſt in both caſes be the ſame. It may explore the cauſes of beauty in viſible objects, or of harmony in ſound, juſt as well as the moſt abſtract relations of a triangle: truth and falſehood, probable or certain, are ſtill its only concern; and unleſs beauty and harmony previouſly and independently delighted, the reſult upon the mind would be equally unintereſting. It may treat of principles of action in man, juſt as well as of *vis inertiæ* in matter: but, as incapable of affecting the mind in any other way than through the agency of objects which previouſly affected it, it can never operate as an original principle of action itſelf; though, by being frequently converſant with ſuch powers, it may ſometimes, by a natural deluſion, ſeem to do ſo.

This

This remark, you perceive, is of extenſive application. The ſubject before us, muſt limit our preſent uſe of it. Our moral ſentiments are original principles of action; and cannot therefore, as ſuch, be derived from reaſon. We do not merely *believe* an action to be of a certain deſcription called moral or immoral; we *approve* or *diſapprove* it as ſuch; and this ſentiment of approbation and diſapprobation has a poſitive influence on human conduct. But approbation and diſapprobation are emotions of the mind; and cannot, conſequently, originate from reaſon. We may obſerve, accordingly, that Mr. Hume, who has laboured hard to refer morality as far as poſſible to reaſon, has been obliged to reſort at laſt to a ſentiment of humanity implanted in our nature, to a feeling entirely underived from reaſon, to account for the only principle which ſets it in action, and without which it would be nothing more than an empty ſpeculation and dead letter.* No reaſoning on the tendency to augment or diminiſh the general happineſs, in which he (with others) eſtabliſhes the ſtandard of right and wrong, could give origin to this feeling. Reaſon, no doubt,

* Prin. of Mor- ſect. 5.

by

by ſhewing that any action had one or other of theſe tendencies, might induce me to call it by one or other of theſe denominations, as I ſhould name a Kangaroo a quadrupede, and a Penguin a bird, from their falling under one or other of theſe claſſes—but, unleſs I was previouſly ſo intereſted in the general happineſs, as to approve whatever promoted, and blame whatever obſtructed that end, reaſon could no more excite theſe emotions from ſuch tendencies, than Euclid could inflame me with love for a triangle, or averſion to a circle, from the remoteſt of their geometrical relations. The very theory which places virtue in utility, preſumes on a general affection for the general good (which is the end of utility) or it would not otherwiſe be of power to delude the public for a moment. If Mr. Godwin, who has diſcreetly paſſed over this high matter in ſilence, relying on an internal ſentiment thus exiſting in his favour, if Mr. Godwin can ſhew me any reaſon, not founded on a feeling independent of all argument, why I ſhould abſtractedly prefer the production of good to the production of evil—*erit mihi magnus Apollo*; and I will ſubſcribe to his dogmas as oracles to-morrow.

Holding

Holding this to be utterly impoſſible; and aſſuming that our moral ſentiments, as original principles of action, operating through an affection of the mind, muſt proceed from ſome cauſe diſtinct from reaſon, and adapted to that effect, where, let me aſk, are we to look for this cauſe, but in the immediate objects *in* which and *on* which it acts; in the qualities which ſtrike us as moral or immoral, and in the acknowledged properties of the human mind. To deduce theſe ſentiments from a general ſentiment (for to ſome ſentiment we muſt at laſt recur) in favour of their ultimate end, is perfectly prepoſterous. The greater part of our moral ſentiments are not reſolvable into any ſuch ſentiment at all, general or particular; and of thoſe which ſeem ſo, the particular muſt have conducted to the general ſentiment, and cannot be derived from it. We might as well affirm, that particular objects ſtruck us as beautiful, from a reference to ſome abſtract idea of univerſal beauty, as that particular acts of beneficence excited our approbation, from our general approbation of beneficence. Particular objects muſt have ſtruck us as beautiful, before we had aſcertained the general properties in which beauty conſiſts: particular actions muſt have excited our approbation as

beneficent, before we had formed a notion of beneficence in the abſtract.

If you aſk me, after this, from whence I derive our moral ſentiments, in what I place the efficient cauſe of moral diſtinction, I do not heſitate to refer you to the account of theſe ſentiments by Adam Smith; not as adopting all his inferences with unqualified aſſent, nor as ſuppoſing that he has exhauſted a ſubject productive, in its nature, to the power of the ſearcher; but from a firm and rooted conviction, that he has opened and explored the only quarry from which any ſolid concluſion on the ſubject will ever be deduced. Paſſing over all ſpeculations on the relative properties or ultimate tendency of moral qualities, as totally incompetent to *form* ſuch impreſſions, and diſdaining the clumſy artifice of a moral ſenſe peculiarly adapted to *receive* them, he has looked for our moral ſentiments in the acknowledged properties of the objects we regard as moral or immoral, acting on the acknowledged properties of the mind of man—and he has found them there. His ſolution, as far as I know, has never been conteſted; and if its influence has not been adequate to its merits, it is imputable to our being but little intereſted in the

the origin of principles which operate independently of all our ſpeculations about them. We conſider ſuch enquiries as at beſt but matters of curious reſearch. Burke, who with far greater powers, has explored an analogous ſubject, and developed the ſources of the ſublime and beautiful, has perhaps been ſtill leſs efficacious. What effect, indeed, would we require from ſuch works? The object of theſe writers has not been preſumptuouſly to lay down new laws of their own, for the direction of our taſte and the regulation of our conduct; but carefully to inveſtigate the proceſſes which nature has adopted for this purpoſe: and it is not till we are ſtaggered, perplexed, and diſguſted, by miſchievous and phantaſtic theories, ſpun out of falſe principles, that we reſort with a genuine reliſh to the true. If you ſhould read the work I have quoted, after the peruſal of this letter, you will feel, I think, the full force of this obſervation.

Nothing can be better founded than the principle of the theory there ſtated, or more natural and ſatisfactory than the ſolution it affords. It places the grounds of our moral approbation and our blame, not in a painful ſcrutiny into the *conſequences* of actions, which we rarely regard, and which

which it is an effort to purſue, but in the *ſentiments* and *paſſions* from whence they ſpring, and which they kindle; affections which touch us by an involuntary ſympathy, and find an echo in every breaſt.—We enter into the feelings of thoſe around us—without this, their conduct could operate upon us no otherwiſe than if they were mere automata. We enter thus into their feelings, becauſe, as ſuſceptible of the ſame impreſſions ourſelves, the occaſion immediately ſuggeſts how we ſhould feel ſo circumſtanced. *Non ignara mali, miſeris ſuccurrere diſco*, is the language of poetry and truth; and applicable to every ſympathy, as well as to compaſſion. When the feelings of others are found, on this ſuggeſtion, in concord with our own, they touch us with delight, and excite our approbation: when otherwiſe, they affect us with diſguſt, and provoke our cenſure. Had we been ſo conſtituted, accordingly, as to feel for others as acutely as they feel for themſelves, our approbation would have been indiſcriminate; all conduct would have affected us alike; and no ſuch conſequence as moral diſtinction could poſſibly have reſulted. As we are naturally diſpoſed, however, to enter into ſome affections and paſſions more readily than into others—into thoſe which directly act upon

upon the mind, as joy or grief, than thoſe which reſult from ſome phyſical diſpoſition of the body, as hunger or deſire—into thoſe which are common to all ages and temperaments, as emulation, than thoſe which are peculiar to ſome, as love—into thoſe which generate others congenial to themſelves, as gratitude, than thoſe which generate the reverſe, as reſentment—and into none, unleſs we are equally acted upon by the ſame common cauſe, in a degree equal to that of the perſon principally affected—ſo, to procure that perfect ſympathy which conciliates approbation, two different efforts are required, giving riſe to two different ſets of virtues, eſtimable and valuable (like every thing elſe) according to the delight they afford, and the difficulty of their attainment: 1ſt. that of the ſpectator, to enter into the feelings of the perſon principally affected; from whence we derive all the amiable virtues, which turn on ſenſibility: and 2dly. that of the perſon principally concerned, to reduce his feelings to the ſtandard of the ſpectator's ſympathy; from whence originate all the reſpectable virtues which turn on ſelf-command: into which two deſcriptions of virtue, thus modifying the original paſſions of our nature, ſubmitting the more ſelfiſh to the more enlarged, reſtraining the unſocial,

and

and ſtimulating the benevolent, whatever has obtained the eſtimation of mankind as virtuous, is reſolvable; and in reference to which, we approve or condemn whatever is the object of moral ſentiment.*

* Will the candid Reader allow me one remark, at parting. It has been objected, that this principle of Sympathy is of much too refined and delicate a nature to ſerve the important ends I have aſſigned it: but thus it is with moſt of the actuating principles in our compoſition; full of energy in their operation, they almoſt elude apprehenſion when we come to analyſe them. It does appear to me that it was the want of ſuch a principle, which drove the founders of the New Syſtem of Morals to the adoption of their wretched theory: they conſidered man as a being actuated ſolely by perſonal pleaſure and perſonal pain, and incapable of participating in the feelings of others [1]: on this ſcheme of things, they could place virtue and vice (which evidently had relation to thoſe feelings) in nothing but the imparting indefinitely pleaſure or pain to others; and they could aſſign no obligation to do the one act or abſtain from the other, but the conſequent pleaſure or pain accruing to ourſelves [2]—they had no other materials to work with. The doctrine of Sympathy juſt ſupplies that connecting principle between man and man, which theſe theoriſts wanted: it aſſumes a plain fact, felt by all and confeſſed by all, though it may eſcape attention in the ardour of conſtructing ſyſtems—it avers that we do, and that by a law of our nature we muſt, participate in the feelings of others; and it accounts, from this participation, for thoſe ſentiments which, without it, are perfectly inexplicable.

[1] See the 3d Tract prefixed to Law's Edit. of King's Or. of Evil. ſection 10.

[2] See Prelim. Diſs. in Law's Edit. of King's Or. of Evil. ſection 2. and Paley's Mor. and Pol. Phi. B. 2. c. 1. 2. and 3.

On

On this theory all is regular, conſiſtent, harmonious ; in perfect concord with our feelings and experience ; and exactly agreeable to the general œconomy of nature. It comes home to the boſoms of us all. We are not left, under this ſcheme, as on the ſyſtem of expediency, to conſume life in groping our way through it; as much agaze at its moſt ordinary duties, as at its higheſt functions; the ſport of every guſt ; without any other direction than caprice, without any other impulſe than fanaticiſm. Our appetites and paſſions ſtand as the true original principles of action ; each poſſeſſing, like the correſpondent powers in phyſical nature, a certain determinate deſtination, which would be miſſed, and to a loſs incalculable, in the ſuſpenſion even of the meaneſt of them. As neither poſſeſſing, however, like thoſe powers, a certain determinate force, nor acting on the ſame unchangeable ſubſtance ; but varying in different tempers and conditions, and operating on all the varieties of life and ſociety, our moral ſentiments ariſe, a part of our nature too, to regulate their impulſe. While paramount to theſe, and arbiter of all, preſides the underſtanding; not to ſuperſede, but to ſuperintend, their agency—not to ſubſtitute, for living prolific principles, bewildering

ſpe-

ſpeculations; but by enlarging our view of the ſphere in which they act, and unfolding as well the ends for which they were implanted, as the natural ſanctions by which they are guarded and enforced, to aſcertain and to adjuſt their reſpective boundaries, to ſtimulate the languor of ſome, to curb the impetuoſity of others, to ratify the authority of all, and to ſupply that authority (where requiſite) by the aid of civil inſtitutions and a ſenſe of religious obligation.

But I have already tranſgreſſed the limits of my ſubject, and haſten to ſubſcribe myſelf, &c. &c.

P. S. That I may not appear to ſtand alone in this controverſy, let me adduce one authority in my favour, which occurred rather too late for inſertion in the former copy that I ſent you of this letter; but which is ſo full and expreſs to my purpoſe, that I cannot forbear annexing it to this. It requires no comment.

" Without inquiring how far and in what"
" ſenſe, virtue is reſolvable into benevolence,"
" and vice into the want of it; it may be proper"
" to obſerve, that benevolence and the want of"
" it

" it ſingly conſidered, are in no ſort the whole"
" of virtue and vice. For if this were the caſe,"
" in the review of ones own character or that"
" of others, our moral underſtanding and moral"
" ſenſe would be indifferent to every thing, but"
" the degrees in which benevolence prevailed,"
" and the degrees in which it was wanting."
" That is, we ſhould neither approve of bene-"
" volence to ſome perſons rather than to others,"
" nor diſapprove injuſtice and falſhood upon any"
" other account, than merely as an overballance"
" of happineſs was foreſeen likely to be produ-"
" ced by the firſt, and of miſery by the ſecond."
" But now on the contrary, ſuppoſe two men"
" competitors for any thing whatever, which"
" would be of equal advantage to each of them:"
" Though nothing indeed would be more im-"
" pertinent, than for a ſtranger to buſy himſelf"
" to get one of them preferred to the other; yet"
" ſuch endeavour would be virtue, in behalf of"
" a friend or benefactor, abſtracted from all"
" conſideration of diſtant conſequences: as that"
" examples of gratitude, and the cultivation of"
" friendſhip, would be of general good to the"
" world. Again, ſuppoſe one man ſhould, by"
" fraud or violence, take from another the fruit"
" of his labour, with intent to give it to a third,"

" who, he thought, would have as much plea-"
" ſure from it, as would ballance the pleaſure"
" which the firſt poſſeſſor would have had in the"
" enjoyment, and his vexation in the loſs of it;"
" ſuppoſe alſo that no bad conſequences would"
" follow: yet ſuch an action would ſurely be"
" vitious. Nay farther, were treachery, violence"
" and injuſtice, no otherwiſe vitious than as"
" foreſeen likely to produce an overballance of"
" miſery to ſociety; then, if in any caſe a man"
" could procure to himſelf as great advantage"
" by an act of injuſtice, as the whole foreſeen"
" inconvenience likely to be brought upon"
" others by it, would amount to; ſuch a piece"
" of injuſtice would not be faulty or vitious at"
" all: Becauſe it would be no more than, in"
" any other caſe, for a man to prefer his own"
" ſatisfaction to another's in equal degrees. The"
" fact then appears to be, that we are conſtitu-"
" ted ſo, as to condemn falſhood, unprovoked"
" violence, injuſtice, and to approve of benevo-"
" lence to ſome preferably to others, abſtracted"
" from all conſideration, which conduct is like-"
" lieſt to produce an overballance of happineſs"
" or miſery. And therefore, were the Author of"
" nature to propoſe nothing as an end but the"
" production of happineſs, were His moral cha-"

" racter

" racter merely that of benevolence ; yet ours is"
" not ſo. Upon that ſuppoſition indeed, the"
" only reaſon of His giving us the abovemen-"
" tioned approbation of benevolence to ſome"
" perſons rather than others, and diſapprobation"
" of falſhood, unprovoked violence, and injuſ-"
" tice, muſt be, that He foreſaw, this conſtituti-"
" on of our nature would produce more happi-"
" neſs, than forming us with a temper of mere"
" general benevolence: But ſtill, ſince this is"
" our conſtitution, falſhood, violence, injuſtice,"
" muſt be vice in us, and benevolence to ſome"
" preferably to others, virtue ; abſtracted from all"
" conſideration of the overballance of evil or good,"
" which they may appear likely to produce."

* * * * * *

" I am not ſenſible that I have, in this obſer-"
" vation, contradicted what any author deſigned"
" to aſſert. But ſome of great and diſtinguiſhed"
" merit, have I think expreſſed themſelves in a"
" manner, which may occaſion ſome danger, to"
" careleſs readers, of imagining, the whole of"
" virtue to conſiſt in ſingly aiming, according to"
" the beſt of their judgment, at promoting the"
" happineſs of mankind in the preſent ſtate ;"
" and the whole of vice, in doing what they"

" foreſee,

" foreſee, or might foreſee, is likely to produce"
" an overballance of unhappineſs in it; than which"
" miſtakes, none can be conceived more terri-"
" ble. For it is certain, that ſome of the moſt"
" ſhocking inſtances of injuſtice, adultery, mur-"
" der, perjury, and even of perſecution, may, in"
" many ſuppoſeable caſes, not have the appear-"
" ance of being likely to produce an overbal-"
" lance of miſery in the preſent ſtate; perhaps"
" ſometimes may have the contrary appearance."
" For this reflection might eaſily be carried on,"
" but I forbear." Butler's Analogy: Diſſert. II. of the Nature of Virtue: Obs. 5th.

He would not have forborne, I think, had he lived to ſee what we have witneſſed.

FINIS.

4 OC 58